

# ROOMMATES



## 101:

### MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR ROOMMATE RELATIONSHIP

A guide to help you and your roommate make  
this year the best it can be.



Western Oregon  
UNIVERSITY

# WELCOME TO WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY!

In the Office of University Housing, we believe that a major part of the college experience is getting adjusted to a community living environment. You may never have had roommates before, let alone this many close neighbors. Therefore, we have created this guide to help you begin discussions with your roommate, talk about what the experience of living together should look like and also to help you solve issues as they arise. We sincerely believe that the time and effort that you put into reading this guide and completing the activities will make your living environment and stay at WOU more pleasurable and beneficial.

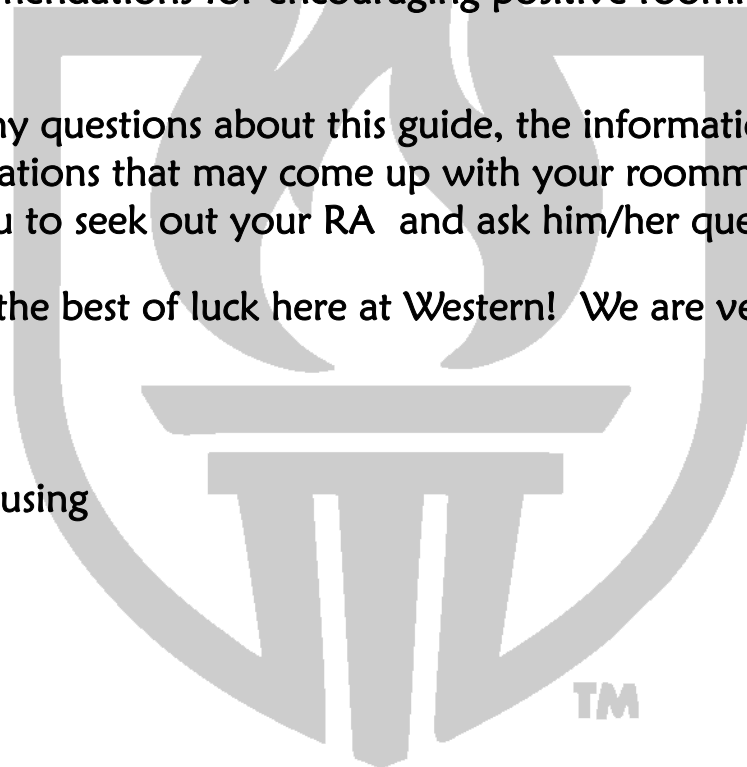
This guide is intended to support you as you begin to live with a roommate. It includes:

- Activities designed to foster your personal insight.
- A suggested outline and sample questions for initiating dialogue between you and your roommate to better understand each other.
- Suggestions for addressing conflicts and issues with your roommate and recommendations for encouraging positive roommate relationships.

If you have any questions about this guide, the information contained herein, or situations that may come up with your roommate, we encourage you to seek out your RA and ask him/her questions.

We wish you the best of luck here at Western! We are very excited that you are here!

University Housing



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# YOU AND YOUR ROOMMATE

Living with a roommate is most likely a brand new experience for you, but there is no need to be nervous or scared about it. This is an opportunity to embrace with an open mind. Sharing your space with a roommate affords you many positive things: a chance to share opinions in a safe place, an opportunity to share your interests and develop new ones, and someone to share your good times with. Yes, sharing a room with another person may present you with a few challenges, but those challenges don't have to cast a negative shadow over your time at Western. It's learning how to navigate those challenges successfully that will strengthen your relationship with your roommate and help you enjoy your time at college.

In terms of your relationship with your roommate, it helps to remember that roommates do not have to be best friends. It is not always necessary for roommates to have common interests or spend all waking hours together. One of the greatest things about coming to a college campus is learning about so many people who look different than you, speak differently than you do and who were raised in a different environment than you were. Learning to accept and respect the differences between your roommate and yourself can be a valuable part of your overall education.

A simple rule regarding living with roommates is this: sharing a room does not instantly mean free-for-all use of each other's personal belongings. You may agree that some items can be shared freely, but wait until it's discussed before using them. You will have a chance to discuss this and note which items are available for anyone to use in the roommate agreement included in this guide.

And finally, always remember that roommates are individuals with likes and dislikes and these should be respected, the same as yours. Roommates are also individuals with their own opinions and beliefs. Don't shut them out because they see things from a different point of view. Spend some time listening to them, you may just learn something new.

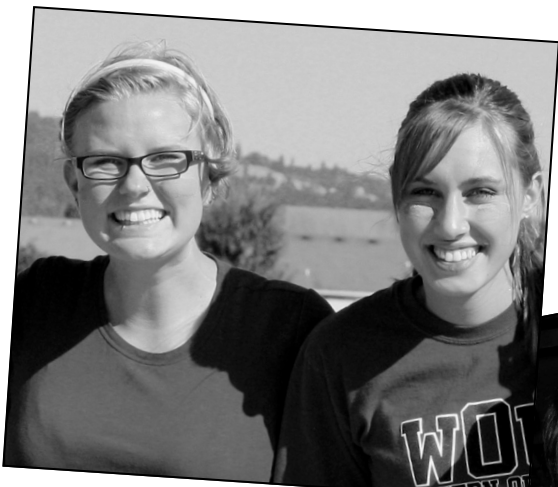
It's up to you to define the relationship that you will have with your roommate. However, a strong living relationship and friendship doesn't just happen, it takes constant effort and even compromise. Your roommate can either be a source of deep friendship or chronic aggravation...it's mainly up to you to make that decision.



# LIVING WITH A ROOMMATE

## A Roommate's Bill of Rights

- \* You have the right to study in your room free from unusual distractions.
- \* You have the right to equal use of all common areas and facilities.
- \* You have the right to entertain guests of either gender in the room in a manner that does not offend your roommate.
- \* You have the right to live in a clean room in which each roommate does an equal share of the work.
- \* You have the right to live in a room free from illegal/prohibited substances or other prohibited items.
- \* You alone have the right to dictate the use of your possessions.
- \* You have the right to decline requests by your roommate for over-night guests.



# STARTING THE DISCUSSION

As you begin your discussion with your new roommates, it's important to understand who you are and why you are at WOU. Understanding what is important in your living environment and in your relationship with your roommate will help you determine and define what is important to you. By taking time to determine your own needs and wants, likes and dislikes, it will be easier to communicate with your roommate.

Take some time to reflect on these questions as you begin to have discussions with your roommate about your living space. These questions will help you develop your living preferences.

## WHO I AM

- Why am I going to Western Oregon University?
- What are my future goals?
- What are some things I like and don't like?
- What are my attitudes and feelings about studying?
- How often do I want guests and visitors in my room?
- How much do I use alcohol and do I want it in my room?
- What do I like to have clean, and when do I clean it?
- Of all of my possessions, what can my roommate use?
- Do I always want the door closed when I'm not inside?
- How do I act when I get angry?
- What do I do when I'm sad? Should people leave me be?
- Does profanity bother me?
- Should the window be open when I'm sleeping?
- Am I a morning person?
- How early do I go to bed? How early do I wake up?
- Can I sleep with the lights on and noise in the room?
- Do I like to study with the music on?
- Would I leave the room if my roommate wants to sleep?
- Do I care if my roommate borrows my clothes?
- Do I tell people when they do something that bothers me?



Now that you have taken time to think about what you would like out of your roommate relationship and what some of your preferences are, you are ready to really begin the discussion with your roommate about this upcoming year and to lay the groundwork together for a good year!



# STARTING THE DISCUSSION

Prior to filling out a roommate agreement (see your RA for yours), it's important that you take a few minutes to learn more about your roommate, where they come from, what they enjoy doing, and their living preferences. Here are some discussion questions and topics to aid you in this activity; however, feel free to deviate and come up with your own questions.

## BACKGROUND

- How many brothers and sisters do you have? What about your parents?
- Where are you from? Can you describe your hometown in three words?
- What will you miss least while being at Western? What will you miss most?
- What did you like most about your high school experience? Least?
- Who is your best friend back home? Why are they so important to you?

## PERSONAL PREFERENCES/CHARACTERISTICS

- Why did you pick Western Oregon?
- How do you like to spend your free time?
- What kind of music do you listen to?
- How do you feel about alcohol and other drugs?
- How important are grades to you?
- How often and how long do you study?
- How much sleep do you like to get?
- How important is tidiness to you?
- Are you healthy most of the time?
- What do you do to relax?
- What do you like to do for exercise?
- What is it like for you to meet new friends?
- Are you involved in a significant romantic relationship?

## HIGHS AND LOWS

- What are you like when you are down or upset?
- Do you tend to express your feelings verbally or do you prefer to not share at all?
- What will usually cheer you up?
- What makes you angry?
- What is your pet peeve?
- What annoys you?
- Are there times you prefer to be alone?
- How do people know when you are mad or upset?
- How would you describe your mood most of the time?
- How do you respond under pressure?
- Would you describe yourself as a competitive person?



# RESOLVING DIFFERENCES

The best approach to resolving issues in relationships is to keep the lines of communication open and discuss problems and concerns before the pressure begins to build. Honest discussions and negotiation can bring solutions to most concerns.

There are three essential factors in assertive communication:

- **Direct:** Take your issue or concern directly to your roommate.
- **Honest:** Be emotionally honest about how his/her behavior makes you feel.
- **Appropriate:** It needs to be the right place and time; keep it private and personal.

Here are some topics that you and your roommate can talk through when your issues arise. Allow each person an opportunity to express his or her thoughts and feelings on these topics.

1. **WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?** State the problem as you see it.
2. **HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT IT?** Share your feelings about the issue
3. **WHAT DO YOU WANT OR NEED?** Describe how you think the problem could be solved. What would you like for your roommate to do? What is keeping this from happening?
4. **HOW COULD YOU HELP?** Offer what you would be willing to do to help the situation.
5. **WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE?** Discuss other options to ensure that you have considered many different ways of resolving the issue.
6. **WHAT IS OUR FINAL DECISION?** Come to a mutual understanding of how you are each going to improve the situation.

So, what happens when you've tried, but you just can't get along? Talk to your RA together. He or she can assist with these types of situations. You can also revisit your roommate agreement and ask the RA to sit in on it with you. They might be able to help mediate the conversation. You also can talk with your Area Coordinator. We do have a formal mediation process in place, so please take advantage of this if you and your roommate feel that you need it.



# COMMON ROOMMATE ISSUES

Sometimes issues between roommates cannot be negotiated. Listed here are concerns that you might face with your roommate and suggestions for how to address these issues.

- YOU ARE MORE SOCIAL AND YOUR ROOMMATE IS MORE RESERVED

That's okay. One of the joys of living in the residence halls is getting to meet people who are different from you and learning how to live with them in a productive environment. Don't push your roommate beyond their boundaries; don't try to force them past their comfort zone. If it is simply that they are shy, be patient with them. If they are naturally more reserved, respect that and respect the fact that you are sharing your room; you need to keep your roommate's comfort in mind at all times.

- YOUR ROOMMATE DOES NOT WANT TO BE GOOD FRIENDS

Roommates do not need to be best friends. However, they need to establish a respectful relationship. Remember that you don't have to do everything together (like eating together or going to social activities on campus). Sometimes, you will need a break from each other. But you do need to put effort into creating a cordial and respectful relationship. Why not try to make Tuesday "dinner night" where just the two of you go eat dinner together on Tuesdays? Or how about Thursday "movie night" where just the two of you sit down and watch your favorite movies every Thursday? Maybe you don't hang out any other time of the week but you make sure to stay in touch and updated on each other's lives during your one night a week that you have set aside for each other.

- ONE OF YOU IS A BORROWER

Do not get into the habit of borrowing without asking, especially when your roommate is not around. If your roommate is a borrower, be open and tell him/her how you feel about this. Try to come up with some compromises about mutual sharing and splitting the costs of items you both use. You can always revisit your roommate agreement and change the answers you made regarding "community/personal property".

- ONE OF YOU IS VERY CLEAN, THE OTHER IS VERY...NOT

If you constantly dust around your bed and your roommate's bed is perpetually unmade, this may be a source of tension. Try to determine a physical space for each of you and respect this. You should not set up a partition, but divide the room so that each of you has your own space. You also need to remember, however, what is reasonable to expect from your roommate. Vacuuming and dusting every day is a positive habit, but it's not reasonable to expect any college student to do so. Vacuuming once or twice a week, however, is reasonable. Keep this in mind as you have discussions about cleanliness and tidiness with your roommate.



# HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

## STRATEGIES FOR A HEALTHY ROOMMATE RELATIONSHIP

### DO...

- Regard your roommate as an equal.
- Spend time with your roommate. It's easier to live with a friend than to co-exist with a stranger. Share your mutual interests and discuss your differences.
- Work out an agreement on chores. Issues over unmade beds, clutter, items left on the floor, and the like often cause conflicts. Fill out your Roommate Agreement.
- Set up guidelines for sharing. How does your roommate feel about loaning his or her possessions? Some roommates don't mind, others do. Make sure your roommate knows how you feel and that you respect how they feel. There is a section in the Roommate Agreement to address the issue of sharing.
- Arrange your study schedule. If you plan to do most of your studying in your room, let your roommate know. Do you study best with a radio or television on, or is silence most conducive to successful studying? Agree on some general study hours and note them in your Roommate Agreement.
- Check out the visitor situation. Does your roommate stay up late with friends? Do you socialize during the week or only on the weekends? Sit down with your roommate and discuss the issue of visitation. There are some questions regarding visitation in the Roommate Agreement, but as more situations and questions arise, make sure to discuss them.
- Keep the lines of communication open. Chances are good that if something about the living situation bothers you, it's also bothering your roommate. Be tactful and remember that you need to live with your roommate even after the discussion is over. Don't burn any bridges.
- Finally, think of your living situation as a household. Ideally, the concerns of a household are the concerns of each of its members. No single member dominates, no single member feels oppressed. It's a balanced lifestyle you're seeking.

### DON'T...

- Procrastinate about talking with your roommate and go on to tell everyone else about the problem.
- Try to change your roommate.
- Assume that a problem between you and your roommate is his or her problem.
- Assume that you are right and your roommate is wrong.
- Assume that by doing nothing, the situation will improve.
- Assume that you can just move out.

